

Migratory Landbird Conservation on the Shasta-Trinity National Forest National Forest

Green-Horse Habitat Restoration & Maintenance Project

May 2013

Under the National Forest Management Act (NFMA), the Forest Service is directed to “provide for diversity of plant and animal communities based on the suitability and capability of the specific land area in order to meet overall multiple-use objectives.” (P.L. 94-588, Sec 6 (g) (3) (B)). The January 2000 USDA Forest Service (FS) Landbird Conservation Strategic Plan, followed by Executive Order 13186 in 2001, in addition to the Partners in Flight (PIF) specific habitat Conservation Plans for birds and the January 2004 PIF North American Landbird Conservation Plan all reference goals and objectives for integrating bird conservation into forest management and planning.

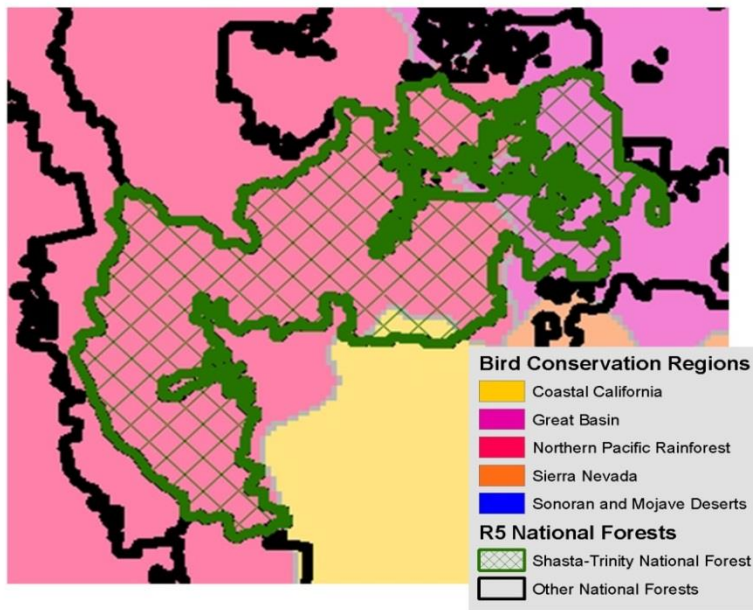
In late 2008, a *Memorandum of Understanding between the USDA Forest Service and the US Fish and Wildlife Service to Promote the Conservation of Migratory Birds* (MOU) was signed. The intent of the MOU is to strengthen migratory bird conservation through enhanced collaboration and cooperation between the Forest Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service as well as other federal, state, tribal and local governments. Within the National Forests, conservation of migratory birds focuses on providing a diversity of habitat conditions at multiple spatial scales and ensuring that bird conservation is addressed when planning for land management activities. The Shasta-Trinity National Forest also provides a comprehensive analysis of available data on migratory and residential landbirds in the Forest Migratory and Residential Bird Population Trend Report.

The Shasta-Trinity National Forest is proposing to manage lands on the National Recreation Area Management Unit. The Green-Horse Habitat Restoration and Maintenance project (Green-Horse project) area is located in northern California above Shasta Lake, approximately 20 miles northeast of Redding. The project is located on the National Recreation Area Management Unit of the Shasta Trinity National Forest, between the Pit Arm, the Squaw Creek Arm and the McCloud Arms of Shasta Lake. The terrain is steep and rugged, with slopes commonly exceeding 50 percent. Elevation within the project area ranges from approximately 1,065 feet to 4,325 feet.

Prescribed burning on NFS lands encompassing approximately 41,836 with Alternative 2 – Proposed Action (132,275 with Alternative 3) is proposed. Proposed management is intended to implement direction contained within the Shasta-Trinity National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP, USFS 1995). Opportunities to promote conservation of migratory birds and their habitats in the project area were considered during development and design of the Green-Horse project (MOU Section C: items 1 and 11 and Section D: items 1, 3, and 4).

The Forest mostly lies in the FWS Bird Conservation Region (BCR) 5 (Northern Pacific Rainforest).

Bird Conservation Regions of the Shasta-Trinity National Forest



The following species both occur on the Forest and are on the FWS list of birds of conservation concern for the BCR 5 (species that do not occur on the Forest have been deleted):

- Western Grebe (nb)
- Bald Eagle (b)
- Northern Goshawk
- Peregrine Falcon (b)
- Caspian Tern
- Black Swift
- Rufous Hummingbird
- Allen's Hummingbird
- Olive-sided Flycatcher
- Willow Flycatcher (c)
- Horned Lark (a)
- Purple Finch

Project-level biologists analyze the effects to Federally listed threatened or endangered birds within the Biological Assessment (BA). Effects to Forest Service designated sensitive birds and their habitats are analyzed within the Biological Evaluation (BE). Additionally the Project Management Indicator Assembly (MIA) report has analyzed project level effects to a select number of birds that represent Forest assemblages. Any additional assessment of effects to select migratory birds or their habitats from the Green-Horse project may be assessed in detail, as appropriate, within the project-level reports.

Likely effects to habitats and select migratory bird populations resulting from the Green-Horse project have been assessed in detail within the project MIA report and impacts to select TES birds and their habitats have been analyzed in the project level reports. Issues related to the effects analyses are summarized below; for full

effects analyses see the BA, BE, and MIA report for the Green-Horse project. Habitats within the project area that would be affected by the proposed activities include mature ponderosa pine, early seral conifer and brush, upper montane mixed chaparral, mid seral coniferous and oak forests, snags and downed logs.

Mature Ponderosa Pine

To avoid high severity burning and loss of large overstory ponderosa pine trees, an important habitat element for nesting bald eagles, brush clearing treatments were designed for the most at-risk nest stands (and potential nest trees and perches). It is in this way that bird species associated with large, overstory ponderosa pine trees and snags, in particular bald eagles, were considered during project design.

Early and mid seral coniferous and oak forest, upper montane chaparral and early seral brush habitats

To avoid high severity burning of the vegetation and loss of large areas of overstory or tree mortality, prescribed burning would begin on the ridge lines and be allowed to back down the slope in a low intensity, mosaic pattern. It is in this way that bird species associated with early and mid seral coniferous forests were considered during project design.

Snag and downed logs

Prescribed fire treatments have been designed to retain downed logs of the largest diameter available of the largest sizes available and to not go below Forest Plan Standards. It is in this way that bird species that utilize cavities as either primary or secondary excavators were considered during project design.

Specific project design criteria that would benefit migratory landbirds and/or their associated habitats include:

- Limited operating period is from *February 1 to July 10* on all activities that would generate noise above ambient levels; and all smoke-generating activities would be prohibited within 0.25 mile of known northern spotted owl (NSO) nest cores and unsurveyed, suitable nesting/roosting habitat.
- Maintain existing snag and large down log levels across the landscape where fuel loading is not excessive; do not go below Forest Plan standards for snags and logs per acre.
- Within occupied or unsurveyed suitable NSO habitat, no more than 50 percent of the nesting, roosting, or foraging habitat would be burned or mechanically treated in a single year in any one 7th-field watershed up to 3,500 acres in size.
- Limited operating period is from January 1 to July 31 on all activities within 0.25 mile of known bald eagle nest sites that would generate noise above ambient levels and smoke-generating activities within 0.25 mile of known nest sites. This limited operating period may be lifted after consultation with the district wildlife biologist based on site-specific assessment of individual bald eagle nest sites.

The project will not adversely affect migratory landbird species or their associated habitats. Potential effects to migratory species would be minimized through project design, integrated design features and adherence to LRMP Standards and Guidelines such as for snags and down woody debris. The project is designed to improve habitat conditions in part by reversing vegetative trends that have resulted from a history of fire suppression.

References

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